

July 2005

## China trip promotes international collaboration

By Joyce Allard\*

Iowa Department of Public Health Director Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen recently returned from China where she participated in state cabinet meetings and visits with public health officials. "The trip was a tremendous opportunity for learning more about public health issues in other parts of the world," Dr. Hansen said.

Gov. Tom Vilsack led the state delegation that included Dr. Hansen, Economic Development Director Mike Blouin, Iowa Sister States staff, business leaders and representatives from the University of Northern Iowa.

Dr. Hansen said the trip was valuable in a number of ways. She formed partnerships with two large public health departments in China to begin discussing how public health in Iowa might act as consultants and partners to Hebei Province and the city of Tianjin.

"The trip was just the beginning of a relationship that allows both parties to continue to learn together," said Dr. Hansen. "It was an opportunity to take one of

Continued on page 8



Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen is pictured at an official dinner with Dr. Tian Hui Guang, (left) chief physician and deputy director-general of the Tianjin Bureau of Public Health, and Dr. Zhang Jun Fang, vice mayor of Tianjin.

## State leaders celebrate new Iowa Laboratories Facility

By Brenda Henning\*

Calling it a testament to innovative collaboration, Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), joined Iowa Governor Thomas Vilsack and several state leaders, to celebrate the opening of the joint Iowa Laboratories Facility in a ribbon cutting ceremony June 7. This is the new facility for the IDPH's State Medical Examiner's office.

"This building will always be a testament to what innovative collaboration among public and private partners

can accomplish," said Dr. Hansen at the official public open house. "This state-of-the art facility marks our efforts to advance forensic science and public health in Iowa."

The IDPH is one of four state agencies that will share the \$52 million state labs facility on Des Moines Area Community College's (DMACC) Ankeny campus. The building's construction was paid for with a mix of local, state and federal dollars and was built on land donated by the college.

Continued on page 10



# Department wide move set to finish by July

By Anthony Menendez\*

**T**wo bureaus of the Iowa Department of Public Health recently relocated to the Lucas Building to streamline communication among them and the other department's bureaus.

The Bureau of Emergency Services and the Bureau of Radiological Health were leasing space on Southwest 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Des Moines. About 20 people work in the two bureaus and adding them to the Lucas Building prompted the relocation of the entire department.

To accommodate the extra people, workspace was reduced so more people could fit into the same amount of square footage. Some cubicles and offices were moved a few feet, while others were moved to different floors.

Services inside of the building also were moved. Construction crews relocated electrical, voice and data lines to the locations of the new workspaces. Information technology workers also installed computer equipment.

The following is a list of the new office locations of the Divisions at the Iowa Dept. of Public Health:

## **Division of Acute Disease Prevention and Emergency Response**

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, NW Quadrant

Bureau of Information Management: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, NW Quadrant

Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (EMS): 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Center for Disaster Operations and Response: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Disease Prevention and Immunization: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, NW Quadrant

## **Division of Behavioral Health and Professional Licensure**

Bureau of Disability and Violence Prevention: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Substance Abuse: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Personnel, Planning and Education: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Office of Gambling Treatment and Prevention: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Office of Substance Abuse Prevention: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Professional Licensure: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, NW Quadrant

## **Division of Environmental Health**

Bureau of Radiological Health: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Office of Local Environmental Health Assistance: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics: 1st Floor

Bureau of Lead Poisoning Prevention: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Bureau of Environmental Health Services: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

## **Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention**

Bureau of Nutrition and Health Promotion: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, South Side

Bureau of Oral Health: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Local Public Services: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Family Health: 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, NW Quadrant

Bureau of Health Care Access: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Office of Multicultural Health: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention & Management: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

## **Division of Tobacco Use, Prevention and Control**

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

## **Director's Office**

Bureau of Finance: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

Office of Communications and Public Information: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Office of the Director: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Office of Policy, Legislation and Constituent Relations: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SE Quadrant

Office of State Medical Examiner: Iowa Laboratories, Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), Ankeny

Director's Physician Advisory Group: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, SW Quadrant

*\*Anthony Menendez of Estherville is a summer intern for the Iowa Department of Public Health. He attends Luther College in Decorah.*



**Iowa Department of Public Health**

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# Updated and new public health resources to be released at Barn Raising V

By Louise Lex, Ph.D.\*

**T**he Governor's Conference on Public Health: Barn Raising V will offer participants a rich menu of resources that will include new and updated take home publications, special pre-conference and evening training sessions, the chance to network with colleagues at a smoke-free Taste of Iowa Smorgasbord and a venue to showcase products and programs at poster and conversation sessions.

Set for July 28-29 at Drake University, Des Moines, "Building Iowa as a Healthy Community," the name of this year's event, also will center on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of organized public health for the state of Iowa when the first state board of health meeting was held in 1880. As part of the anniversary emphasis, participants will receive a copy of the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* magazine featuring people and events that have shaped public health in Iowa. This state has a proud history of men and women who have had a major impact on the public's health—reaching far beyond our borders. This story is an unforgettable one of courage, initiative, and persistence.

In addition to the commemorative *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* magazine, conference members will receive the 2005 *Iowa Health Fact Book* in CD-ROM format. This resource will cover the latest data on disease incidence and mortality, health and social behaviors, health resources, and environmental factors. This collaborative publication effort by the University of Iowa College of Public Health and the Iowa Department of Public Health began with the first Barn Raising conference in 1997. Since that time, the fact book has become a valued resource for health care providers, health policy makers, public health practitioners and health researchers alike.

Plans also are underway to distribute hard copies of the midcourse update of *Healthy Iowans 2010*. Other publications available at breakout sessions include an updated *EPI Manual* for local public health workers, hospital infection control practitioners, laboratories and health care providers. The manual covers what is considered a reportable disease in Iowa, what are the public health issues with the disease and outbreak investigations to prevent and control the disease. The

*Food-borne Manual* also will be available. This manual will assist public health practitioners in the definition of what a food borne outbreak is, how to investigate a food borne outbreak and what issues are involved in an outbreak.

Providing an informal format for networking, the "Smoke-free Taste of Iowa Smorgasbord Reception,



July 28, will feature over a dozen restaurants which offer smoke-free dining at their establishments.

Throughout the conference, programs and speakers at the event will be available for dialogue and to answer questions at poster and conversation sessions.

A pre-conference class, "Beyond Depression: Best Practices for Treating Major Depression," is designed to increase knowledge of best practices in treating major depression. An evening session on abuse mandatory reporter training will be offered for mandatory reporters who are required to report child abuse and dependent adult abuse.

Two Web sites are available for participants to learn more about the conference: [www.thehealthconference.org](http://www.thehealthconference.org) and the department's site at [www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us). Click on conferences.

*Dr. Louise Lex, conference coordinator, is with the Iowa Department of Public Health's Division of Health Behavior and Professional Licensure.*



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# Immunization Registry Information System marks one-millionth patient entry



One million of anything is noteworthy but it's especially so when it marks the number of patient record entries made into the state's Immunization Registry Information System (IRIS), which is what occurred this spring.

The system's purpose, according to Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health, is to permanently capture and store the immunization histories of Iowa's population and to share the data among health care providers enrolled in the system. Since February of 2001, the Iowa Department of Public Health has been working to enroll every public and private clinic into the IRIS system. Currently, there are 124 public health clinics and 301 private provider clinics enrolled.

"Maintaining this data provides important information for Iowa families, the state medical community, and Iowa's health system in general," said Dr. Hansen.

By using this statewide database, medical professionals can ensure Iowans'—and especially children's—health by:

- Printing the official IDPH certificate of immunization;

- Preventing patients from getting unnecessary vaccines;
- Managing their vaccine inventory and ensuring accurate patient record keeping;
- Sending out reminder letters to patients that they need a vaccination, and
- Keeping track of contraindications and health history.

From a statewide perspective, IRIS helps public health officials to identify possible at-risk areas of vaccine-preventable diseases, said Dr. Hansen. "IRIS is an important tool as Iowa works to ensure its children are protected against vaccine-preventable disease," she said.

Because the IRIS system is interconnected, immunization records have a permanent medical home even if patients move. "Our childhood immunization population, the uninsured and underinsured often times do not have a permanent medical home. Yet, IRIS allows them to maintain a permanent record of their immunizations," said Terri Henkels, director of the Polk County Health Department.

The IDPH's Bureau of Disease Prevention and Immunization coordinates the IRIS system.

## Timeline extended for Harkin Wellness Grants

Applicants have an extra month to apply for the "Building Healthy Communities" grants through the Harkin Wellness grants program, announced Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, the senior Democrat on the panel that funds health care initiatives, secured \$3 million in the FY 2005 omnibus appropriations for the grant program.

"The IDPH has had an overwhelming interest from communities around Iowa regarding the Harkin Wellness Grants," she said. To respond to these requests,

she said, the timeline has been extended by one month.

Communities now have until Aug. 1, 2005, to express their intent to apply. Proposals will be due by Aug. 15 and notice of awards will be given Sept. 12, 2005. Both the Project Period and Contract Period will be amended to be effective Oct. 1, 2005, said Hansen.

Grantees will be eligible for up to \$250,000 in funding, depending on the size and scope of the community's project. Officials plan to award at least 36 grants.

All information about the Harkin Wellness grants can be viewed on the IDPH Web site under the link "Availability of Funds" [www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us), or call 515-281-7689.



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans



# Transportation survey being done in three counties

By Tammy O'Hollearn\*

**M**any Iowa counties identify lack of transportation as a barrier to health care access. To assess the extent of the problem, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) is conducting a transportation assessment in three counties this summer.

The counties selected for the pilot assessment are Butler, Monroe and Pottawattamie. IDPH's Bureau of Health Care Access has contracted with the Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA) to conduct the study.

This three-county assessment evolved out of a review of every county's Community Health Needs Assessment and Health Improvement Report between 2000 and 2005. The three counties were selected for the assessment based on their location, rural demographics and transit provid-

ers in their area.

The intent of the transportation assessment is to:

- Create a comprehensive inventory of passenger transportation providers, the services provided and their targeted population in Butler, Monroe, and Pottawattamie Counties;
- Assist these counties to build and strengthen local partnerships among public health care providers and transportation providers;
- Provide recommendations to improve access and a 12-month action plan to implement recommendations; and
- Provide a model for other regions, cities or counties to enhance coordination and access to transportation.



Lack of transportation is a barrier to receiving health care. A transportation assessment is being conducted this summer in three Iowa counties

The study is being conducted under the guidance of the IDPH and the State Transportation Coordination Council (TCC).

The surveys will be sent to each county's health and human service agencies and to transportation providers.

## Workgroups form to address "Iowans Fit for Life" plan

Partnerships are vital to reducing obesity, said a former Iowan and a national health expert from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at the "Iowans Fit for Life Symposium" held in May.



Robin Hamre

Robin Hamre is team leader for the CDC's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases. She was among several other speakers who spoke to more than 300 people on the importance of partnerships in promoting healthy lifestyles and other topics.

At the symposium, workgroups formed and have begun to meet regularly to develop a statewide plan with suggestions on nutrition and physical activity to prevent obesity and other chronic diseases. Funded with a grant from the CDC, the plan will target Iowans of all ages. The next meeting—to be held over the ICN—is set for July 18-20. To participate, contact Sarah Taylor, physical activity coordinator for Iowans Fit for Life, at (515) 242-6709, e-mail [staylor@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:staylor@idph.state.ia.us), or visit the Web site of [www.iowa.gov/iowansfitforlife](http://www.iowa.gov/iowansfitforlife).

The State TCC serves as the project's advisory group. The role of the TCC is to review statewide transportation needs, address coordination issues, and institutional and/or regulatory barriers to coordination. The Iowa TCC consists of representatives from the League of Cities; the Iowa Association of Counties; and the Iowa State Departments of Transportation, Human Services, Public Health, Education, Workforce Development, Elder Affairs, and Human Rights. They have provided input and guidance in the development of the survey instrument and are assisting to identify the list of providers to be surveyed.

The survey was distributed in late June and the final report with recommendations will be complete by Aug. 31, 2005. If you are interested in the passenger transportation assessment or have questions, please contact IPTA's subcontractor Amber L. Wagner, Wagner Resources, (515) 210-5201, or [amber\\_wagner@msn.com](mailto:amber_wagner@msn.com).

*\*Tammy O'Hollearn is rural health resources coordinator for the Iowa Department of Public Health's Bureau of Health Care Access.*



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# Nosologist McDowell gives superior work in coding

## *Receives first-ever NCHS award*

By Brenda Henning\*

Iowans die at a rate of about 27,000 people a year, and for the past 33 years, one Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) employee has been responsible for coding and filing the final moments of each of those lives.

As the state's nosologist in Vital Records, Jerry McDowell's task is to properly classify the diseases and conditions that ultimately cause a person's death. McDowell was recently honored at both the state and national level for his 40 years of outstanding service to state government—all 40 within the IDPH and 33 of those years as nosologist.

While it seems as if McDowell's task of translating diseases into codes is strictly dry, rote data collection, his work—along with the work of other state nosologists—tells a national story of how Americans live—and die—and influences the direction of public health policy and funding.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center Health Statistics (NCHS) is the final repository of America's morbidity stories. They take the statistics submitted by nosologists and turn them into state profiles, which, according to the CDC's Web site, "offer a snapshot of the nation's health." The profiles are also used to "monitor how federal funds and programs aimed at improving the nation's health are being applied at state and local levels."

As a nosologist, his primary task is to classify diseases properly, based on the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) system. Developed collaboratively by the World Health Organization and other groups, this ICD-10 reference helps to ensure that medical terms are comparable internationally so information can then later be used in statistical analysis.

"I have lots of rules to follow and to interpret what the cause of death is," McDowell said. "I have several

manuals which I use and from that the cause of death can be determined."

To become proficient at his work, McDowell has attended several national-level trainings, including medical terminology classes. When he first started, McDowell worked on one of the few computer terminals available at the time. McDowell's job involved looking up each cause of death listed on the certificate and translating it into the right code. With advances in programming technology, McDowell's work today is more automated. He researches and inputs the cause of death listed on the certificates and the computer program determines the correct coding.

While most causes of death are straightforward, there are times, McDowell said, more investigation is required by him to determine the overriding condition. For example, a death certificate may state a person died from a hip fracture.

"A hip fracture may be one condition that led to the person's death," McDowell said. "But then I have to determine what caused the hip fracture. Was the hip fracture caused by a fall or a car accident or some other condition?"

In situations that are unclear, McDowell will request further

information from the certifying physician to ensure the sequential relationship of causes reported is accurate. In a week, McDowell processes an average of 395 to 580 death certificates with at least 50 needing clarification.

The NCHS, the federal agency that monitors and compiles the work of medical coders in the U.S. sets a standard of 6.25 percent error rate. McDowell has maintained a less than 1 percent error rate during 33 years.



State Nosologist Jerry McDowell receives his length of service award from Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson. Pederson also presented McDowell with a plaque from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for McDowell's consistent high quality work.

Continued on page 7



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

## Federal agency gives Iowa's Bureau of Vital Statistics award for quality, timeliness

The Annual Vital Statistics Cooperative recently gave the Iowa Department of Public Health's (IDPH) Center for Health Statistics one of five national awards. It was presented June 7 during the program directors' meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The award was presented in recognition of outstanding performance exceeding contract specifications for delivery of birth data to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center of Health Statistics (NCHS), according to Jill France, chief of the IDPH's Bureau of Vital Statistics. The award was given to the bureau for exceeding all contract requirements for quality and timeliness of delivering the information to the NCHS.

The Vital Statistics Program is a cooperative program on the federal level and has existed since the mid-1920s. All the states, the District of Columbia, New York City and the U.S. Territories are part of the federal program. Data delivered to NCHS compiles the national set of data related to births and deaths in the U.S.

"This award is due to the outstanding work of the staff in Vital Records and Diane Boden who supports the vital statistics from the Bureau of Information Management," said France.

## Nosologist McDowell pays attention to the details

Continued from page 6

This high quality work recently garnered McDowell recognition from the NCHS. They awarded him a first-ever plaque for superior performance and expertise in cause-of-death coding. Out of 57 registered jurisdictions with the NCHS, McDowell consistently maintains the lowest error rate.

His supervisor, Jill France, also praised McDowell. "It's meticulous work and you have to be meticulous to your work, said France, chief of the Bureau of Health Statistics. "We are very fortunate to have Jerry."

The ICD-10 maintains standard coding throughout its revisions, but as the world changes and new diseases and causes of death are identified, the reference system is updated—usually every 10 years. For example, after events such as the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma and the 2001 fall of the World Trade Center buildings in New York City, terrorism was added as a cause of death. In these situations, nosologists are required to seek out permission from the federal government to use a particular code, McDowell said.

Like the codes, the annual deaths in Iowa have remained constant, but there are periods or events that

temporarily increase McDowell's workload. During the winter, McDowell will see a rise in deaths—usually of elderly people who have died from influenza.

Then, in 1989 when a United Airlines DC-10 crashed in Sioux City, McDowell processed over 100 death certificates. When a person is a resident of another area but dies in Iowa, such as the case in the plane crash, McDowell transfers information to that person's primary residence.

While reading about so much death could be considered depressing, McDowell said the work of nosologists is important because it tracks trends that might be changed.

France also noted that maintaining records of death helps save lives. "We no longer have people dying of cholera or other water borne disease because we were able to track how people were dying," she said.

After 40 years in state government, McDowell has no immediate plans to retire. As the lone state nosologist, McDowell first has to train a co-worker in his duties.

"I like what I do," McDowell said. "And I like working for the state."

*\*Brenda Henning is the Focus editor.*



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# China trip promotes international collaboration

Continued from page 1

Iowa's greatest assets—its experts—and promote international innovation and collaboration.

To her knowledge, Dr. Hansen said this is the first time the IDPH has ventured into the international market with the goal of providing consulting services. “In today's global economy, it is imperative that we think like this,” Dr. Hansen said. “It could provide income for IDPH and is part of the governor's vision of state government being more innovative and entrepreneurial.”

“The trip was just the beginning of a relationship that allows both parties to continue to learn together. It was an opportunity to take one of Iowa's greatest assets—its experts—and promote international innovation and collaboration.”

*Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen*

Prior to the trip, extensive research was completed to identify the top public health concerns in China. The research provided the basis for the materials that were created to promote IDPH programs and services.

“The work by IDHP staff prepared me to interact with both health departments. It was critical and paid off in great dividends with the reception I received,” Dr. Hansen said. “They were willing to listen, and having all the materials in Chinese gave them the impression we were respectful of them, their language and culture. They were impressed that we took the time to create a clear message in their language.”

Dr. Hansen said it was an opportunity for her to learn more about their system and their responses to emerging infectious diseases and to share information about our public health responses.

She noted that Iowa has similar health concerns as China. “China's public health system however, focuses on hospital care and their public health infrastructure is just beginning to be built,” she said. “While we were visiting, they made a national announcement regarding HIV/AIDS education.”

Health concerns are similar, but delivery of care has differences, and includes what Americans term alternative medicine. Public health in the United States focuses on disease prevention and health promotion. China's public health officials stressed alternative medicine integrated into their health system. “They were very eager to share information about acupuncture, massage and herbal therapies,” Dr. Hansen said.

Another big issue in China is cigarette smoking. “Smoking currently is done primarily by males,” Dr. Hansen said. “Public health officials are concerned with the increasing rate of smoking among the youth but especially young girls.”

Dr. Hansen stressed that just the fact that she was invited to accompany Gov. Vilsack and Economic Development Director Mike Blouin, re-enforces the priority this administration has put on health care as a critical component of economic development.

“The work of the Iowa Department of Economic Development and the Iowa Sister States program staff was invaluable to the success of the trip,” Dr. Hansen said.

The public health officials in Tianjin expressed an interest in visiting Iowa sometime in the next year. They are particularly interested in learning more about IDPH's programs in health prevention, the health alert network, in addition to women and children's programs.

Among the lessons learned, Dr. Hansen emphasized that public health people around the world are motivated, dedicated and eager to find things that will help improve the health of the people they serve even with resource constraints.

*\*Joyce Allard is community education coordinator.*



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans



# IDPH employees awarded for outstanding service

By Anthony Menendez\*

Four Iowa Department of Public Health employees were honored through the Governor's Golden Dome Program. More than 150 state employees received awards in one of four categories: Employee of the Year; Leader of the Year; Outstanding Service Award; and Lt. Governor's Employee Volunteer Award.

Golden Dome awards are the highest form of employee recognition. Award winners are selected from nominations submitted by their coworkers.



Lois Churchill

IDPH's Leader of the Year was Lois W. Churchill, public service executive III in the Division of Behavioral Health and Professional Licensure Division. With the department for 11 years, her accomplishments over the past year include unifying her staff and developing a streamlined application process. The new process has reduced the processing of application renewals from four weeks to one week.

IDPH's Employee of the Year was Kevin W. Wooddell, word processor II in the Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention. Wooddell works with the Bureau of Family Health's 26 contract agencies. He was nominated for his assistance to coworkers with Microsoft programs and for technical support to "CAREs" participants.



Kevin Wooddell

Two IDPH employees—Debra L. Cooper and Rosalie M. Steele—were selected for the Lt. Governor's Employee Volunteer awards.



Debra Cooper

A recently trained clown, Cooper, environmental specialist senior in the Division of Environmental Health and Health Statistics, participates in the Korn Patch Klown Troupe and the ACTS Clown Troupe. She visits nursing homes and hospitals.



Rosalie Steele

Steele, community health consultant in the Division of Acute Disease Prevention and Emergency Response, is the guardian of a man with developmental disabilities. She was his caseworker when he was placed in the Woodward Resource Center and became his guardian when he turned 18 two years ago. She also was recognized for her service as a college sorority advisor and as a business planning class mentor.

*\*Anthony Menendez of Estherville is a summer intern for the Iowa Department of Public Health. He attends Luther College in Decorah.*

## What weighs 46 tons? The weight lost by Lighten Up Iowa

By Anthony Menendez\*

Lighten Up Iowa completed the 2005 competition with phenomenal results. All together, the participants lost 93,332 pounds, or 46.6 tons of weight. Participants also accumulated 4,674,787 miles of activity.

The five-month competition involved 19,231 participants on 2,705 teams from across the state of Iowa.

This year's competition began on Jan. 19. Teams consisted of two to 10 people. Teams had the option of competing in the weight loss and/or accumulated activity competitions. The weight loss competition consisted of losing weight by having a healthy and appropriate diet, and exercising. The accumulated activity competition consisted of converting activity into miles.

"Team competition keeps people motivated and these numbers indicate that people want to change their lifestyle," commented Jim Hallihan, executive director of The Iowa Sports Foundation.

This program has been proven to be so effective that it is quickly becoming the program of choice for people nationwide. Nearly 20 states have Lighten Up programs including the surrounding states of Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

*\*Anthony Menendez is a summer intern for the IDPH. He attends Luther College in Decorah.*



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# Iowa Laboratories Facility officially opened

Continued from page 1

Along with the State Medical Examiner's Office (SME) of IDPH, the new tenants are the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the University of Iowa Hygienics Laboratory and the Iowa Department of Public Safety. With the facility on the DMACC campus, students will be able to train for careers that would use the labs.

The Iowa Laboratories Facility, said Dr. Hansen, will enhance the work of the IDPH's state medical examiner office by providing capabilities to:

- Perform complex autopsies efficiently in a biologically and physically safe facility;
- Protect and secure evidence and records for criminal cases that meets or exceeds stringent court scrutiny as well as state and national standards;
- Provide a facility that expedites identification of loved ones and determination of cause of death; and
- Handle multiple deaths as necessary for disas-



Dr. Julia Goodin, director of the State Medical Examiner's office speaks with a reporter. Photo by Kevin Teale

ter preparedness, including infectious diseases or mass disasters.

Dr. Hansen emphasized the collaborative work of the SME. She noted they investigate deaths due to virulent or contagious disease, investigate accidents and fatal work-related injuries, which helps other agencies find ways to prevent future accident; and help solve crimes such as homicides by performing autopsies and assisting with medicolegal death investigations. Last year the SME performed 377 autopsies.

Governor Vilsack also highlighted how the cooperation between the State Medical Examiner's office and the crime-solving agency of the Department of Public Safety will make Iowans safer.

"It is a hot day for us today," said Vilsack commenting on the temperature of the day. "But it's going to be an even hotter day for those who try to violate the laws of this state. Because we are going to have a state-of-the-art laboratory that's going to make sure we process evidence as quickly and efficiently as possible."

*\*Brenda Henning is Focus editor.*

## Communications training offered for public health groups



Kevin Teale, director of communications for the Iowa Department of Public Health, makes a point during a recent Public Information Officer Train-the-Trainer session, sponsored by the IDPH's Communications Department and the Center for Disaster Operations and Response.

The workshop was attended by regional public information officer response team members; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regional planners, education and training coordinators, fiscal agents, and Health Resources and Service Area regional planners. Effective communication of risk is vital to public health in times of emergency.

IDPH will continue to work with its local partners to ensure the first public messages in high concern circumstances strike the proper balance between actual hazard and public risk.

Photo by Nicole Peckum



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

# Epidemiology Notes

From the Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology, 1 800 362-2736 (24-hour number)

---

## West Nile virus returns to Iowa

### *Two WNV positive birds found in Iowa*

Two dead birds found in two Iowa counties have tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV), marking a return to Iowa of the virus which killed two Iowans last year and sickened at least 23 others. The confirmatory testing was performed by the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory. The counties where the birds were found are Clarke (blue jay) and Linn (crow).

As of today, no humans or horses in Iowa have been confirmed with the virus this year. Since West Nile first appeared in Iowa four years ago, it's been found in every county in Iowa, either in humans, horses or birds.

"There have been no human cases of West Nile yet in Iowa this year," said Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health. "However, several of our surrounding states have reported human cases. Therefore, Iowans should be taking appropriate precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites not only for West Nile, but because of other mosquito-borne illnesses we see in the state each year."

State health officials offer the following suggestions to reduce your risk of exposure to West Nile:

- Limit outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- If you are outside, cover up as much skin as possible. Wearing long-sleeved shirts, pants, shoes and socks is best.
- Use mosquito repellent on skin not covered by clothing. The most commonly available are those that contain DEET, which comes in a variety of concentrations. Also, federal approval was given this year for two other repellents (oil of lemon eucalyptus and picardin).
- Eliminate mosquito breeding sites, such as standing water in tires, plastic containers or similar water-holding containers. Change water in bird baths every few days. Eliminate standing water on your property.

West Nile is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito

that has picked up the virus while feeding on an infected bird. The illness is not spread person-to-person.

Surveillance programs were put in place many years ago by state and local public health officials, and expanded when West Nile appeared in the United States in 1999. Those programs involve the trapping and testing of mosquitoes, testing chicken flocks placed around the state, and testing dead birds (specifically crows and blue jays) sent in from around the state.

IDPH continues to offer a toll-free hotline for Iowans to receive information about West Nile. That number is 866-WNV-Iowa (1-866-968-4692).

Most humans infected by the West Nile virus have no symptoms, while a few may have symptoms such as a fever and headache. Less than one percent becomes seriously ill. Symptoms typically occur within three to 15 days after the bite of the infected mosquito. Those seriously infected, particularly the elderly, may display symptoms such as muscle weakness, stiff neck, disorientation, and convulsions, and the illness very rarely results in death.

"While some municipal governments in Iowa do have mosquito programs, those programs can not eliminate all mosquitoes in a given area. The best protection is personal protection," said Dr. Patricia Quinlisk, Iowa state epidemiologist. "These steps will help protect you against West Nile and other mosquito-borne diseases. They can also reduce your exposure to other insects such as ticks, which potentially carry Lyme Disease." Guidelines for insect repellent use can be found on the IDPH website at: [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/cade\\_content/mosquito\\_repellents.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/cade_content/mosquito_repellents.pdf)

Since West Nile first arrived in Iowa in 2001, there have been 224 human cases resulting in 10 deaths.



# Worth Noting

---

## Giveaways, literature offered at Iowa State Fair display



If your summer vacation plans include a trip to the Iowa State Fair, Aug. 11-21, stop by the Varied Industries Building where the Iowa Department of Public Health will have its display.

You will be able to meet IDPH staff and pick up brochures and giveaway items such as sun block samples, pens, pencils, magnets and other items.

For the second year, a “scavenger hunt” will be held to encourage fair visitors in physical activity. Everyone completing the hunt will be placed in a daily drawing for a prize.

The booth will be in the middle of the south side of the Varied Industries Building and will be open to visitors from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

## Educational Outreach Programs set for the fall

“Sports Injury in Children” and “Childhood Obesity” will be the topics of fall Educational Outreach Programs (EOP) from the University of Iowa’s College of Public Health.

On Sept. 14, James C. Torner, Ph.D., will present the “Sports Injury in Children” session in Des Moines.

On Nov. 9, Linda Snetselaar R.D., Ph.D., will present “Childhood Obesity” at the Eastern Iowa Community College, Davenport.

According to the university’s Web site, the EOPs are “designed to provide interesting and useful education on important health topics for citizens in selected Iowa communities.” For more information, contact the College of Public Health at 319-384-8421.

## Registrations accepted for Homeland Security Conference

Sessions on water security, public health and emergency preparedness, and others that are relevant to emergency preparedness for public health will be part

of the Governor’s Homeland Security Conference July 26-28 in Des Moines.

Consult <http://www.iowahomelandsecurity.org/> for registration information and a brochure.

---

### Iowa Department of Public Health

Lucas State Office Building  
321 E. 12th Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075  
Phone: 515 281-5787  
[www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us)

What would you like to see in the Iowa Health FOCUS? Send your suggestions for future articles, letters to the editor, upcoming events, or to add names to the mailing list by e-mailing the FOCUS Editor, Brenda Henning at [bhenning@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:bhenning@idph.state.ia.us).



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans